

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 21, 2009

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

Thank you for your leadership in bringing the status of women to the attention of the world community. You know, as we do, that when women are allowed to live up to their full potential, everyone wins.

Last week, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a joint hearing of the Subcommittee on International Operations and Organizations, Democracy, Human Rights and Global Women's Issues and the Subcommittee on African Affairs to examine the use of violence against women, particularly rape, as a tool of war in conflict zones and to explore what steps are being taken to stop this horrific practice once and for all.

The hearing looked specifically at the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Sudan—two countries where sexual violence is a well-documented and pervasive reality. We heard testimony from Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues Melanne Verwee, the Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs, Esther Brimmer, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Phillip Carter, and women from the DRC and Sudan, as well as policy experts. What we learned was shocking, sobering and tragic. We realize that this stain on humanity is well known to you, so there is no need to repeat the stories we heard.

During the hearing, we examined a number of specific recommendations to stop this madness, which we have outlined below. We ask that you examine each in detail, and respond on efforts for implementation.

With respect to the Democratic Republic of Congo, we propose:

- A plan to work with the Government of Congo and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to train and deploy sufficient numbers of Congolese surgeons to perform obstetric fistula surgery for victims of brutal rapes;
- A plan to work with the Government of Congo and NGOs to train and deploy sufficient numbers of mental health professionals to treat the emotional and psychological wounds of those terrorized by violent conflict;

- A plan to work with the Government of Congo to recruit and train all-female police units to help protect and respond to victims of sexual violence;
- A plan to strengthen efforts to help create a strong, independent Congolese legal and judicial system that can help end the culture of impunity that prevails among perpetrators of these crimes;
- An intensified diplomatic effort with both the Rwandan and Ugandan governments to help bring an end to the violence and instability in Eastern Congo.

With respect to Sudan, we propose:

- Continued and ongoing advocacy to ensure that international humanitarian organizations have adequate access and ability to provide services to the millions of displaced Darfuri men, women, and children;
- An assessment of basic needs such as food, water, fuel, and sanitation for women in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps and more robust plans for distributing alternative goods such as solar ovens so that women are not forced to leave the camps for firewood and water, which leaves them vulnerable to attacks;
- Scaling up our work with NGOs and the United Nations to ensure that incidences of violence, and particularly sexual violence, are documented and shared with entities that can help bring perpetrators to justice.

For both the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan and to more broadly address violence against women, we propose:

- A major address at the United Nations by the President or the Secretary of State to coincide with the release of a report in June by the UN Secretary General on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1820. Resolution 1820 demands the immediate and complete cessation of all acts of sexual violence against civilians by all parties to armed conflict;
- United States leadership on the establishment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General to address rape and other sexual violence against women. This would mirror the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, a position created in 1996 to promote and protect the rights of all children affected by armed conflict;
- U.S. support for the establishment of a Security Council Working Group on Sexual Violence and Conflict. This would mirror the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict that was created in 2005. The Working Group works in coordination with the Special Representative for Children to publish country-specific reports on children and armed conflict that serve as “triggers for action” by the

Security Council and put public pressure on countries to halt violations against children;

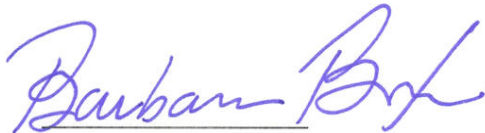
- A high-level delegation of Members of Congress and the Administration to the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan to call attention to these horrors and to discuss U.S. efforts to address these problems;
- The prioritization by the United States of the development, training and equipping of all-female peacekeeping units in our work with the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UNDPKO);
- The inclusion of the prevention of rape and violence against women as a key element of our diplomatic relations with foreign countries. This principle must become a key element of U.S. foreign policy;
- Strong U.S. support for the reorientation of peacekeeping forces in Sudan and Congo to better focus on protecting women and girls where they are most vulnerable, such as firewood collection routes;
- Scaling up our work with NGOs to develop workable and effective economic opportunities for women vulnerable to sexual violence.

We urge you to consider these recommendations and look forward to your response as soon as possible. Given your long commitment to advancing women's rights, we know that you will work to ensure that addressing and preventing violence against women in all of its forms is a top priority of this Administration.

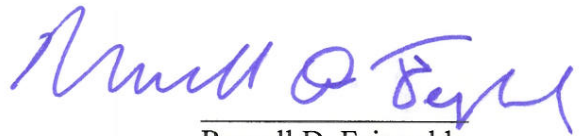
Madam Secretary, every day that goes by without a clear and focused plan means more women devastated by unspeakable violence.

Thank you for your consideration of these important requests.

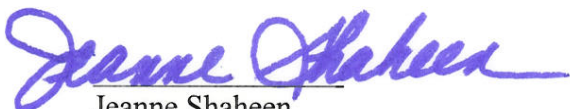
Sincerely,



Barbara Boxer
United States Senator



Russell D. Feingold
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator